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Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives
Organizational session
New York, 19-22 May 1998
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Participation of non-governmental organizations

Proposals on the participation of non-governmental organizations

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. Heads of State and Government at the World Summit for Social Development recognized that the effective implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the Summit requires strengthening community organizations and non-profit non-governmental organizations, enabling them to participate constructively in policy-making and implementation.

2. In its resolution 50/161, the General Assembly reaffirmed the need for effective partnership and cooperation between Governments and the relevant actors of civil society, the social partners, and the major groups as defined in Agenda 21, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, in the implementation of and follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit, and for ensuring their involvement in the planning, elaboration, implementation and evaluation of social policies at the national level. In its resolution 51/202, the Assembly encouraged non-governmental organizations to participate in the work of the Commission for Social Development and in the implementation process related to the Summit to the maximum extent possible.

3. In its resolution 50/161, the Assembly decided to hold a special session in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit. In its resolution 52/25, the Assembly established a Preparatory Committee open to the participation of all States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies, with the participation of observers in accordance with established practices. It also decided that the Preparatory Committee would hold an organizational session of four days' duration, from 19 to 22 May 1998, at which it would decide on the process to be followed to achieve the purpose of the special session with respect to an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit, and the consideration of further actions and initiatives. The Assembly requested that the Preparatory Committee decide, *inter alia*, on the programme and organization of its work, including such issues as documentation, national contributions and inputs from the United Nations system, the election of the bureau, the

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participation of non-governmental organizations, the dates for the special session and other organizational issues.

4. The purpose of the present note is to make proposals to the Committee on modalities for the participation of non-governmental organizations at both substantive sessions of the Preparatory Committee and the special session itself. Examples followed by other special sessions of the Assembly may prove useful in the consideration of these proposals.

5. Participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Preparatory Committee and the special session of the General Assembly for the overall review of the Summit should recognize the great value and wide range of the activities conducted by those organizations during the Summit and its follow-up. Non-governmental organizations have been active partners of Governments and organizations of the United Nations system in implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit. Accordingly, the experience gained will assist in enriching the special session.

II. Role of non-governmental organizations in the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

A. Activities conducted in the context of the Summit and its follow-up

6. More than 1,300 non-governmental organizations were accredited to attend the World Summit for Social Development. During sessions of the Preparatory Committee of the Summit, a non-governmental organizations development caucus was formed that was instrumental in coordinating contributions and harmonizing non-governmental organizations positions. At the Summit itself, non-governmental organizations held a parallel Non-Governmental Organizations Forum and adopted the Copenhagen Alternative Declaration.

7. Since the holding of the Summit, non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society have played a major role in supporting follow-up activities to the Summit, reminding Governments of the commitments made at Copenhagen and sensitizing public opinion on follow-up activities. Conferences, seminars and symposia have been organized at the national, regional and international levels. Operational activities have also been conducted by non-governmental organizations in furtherance of the goals of the Summit at the field level.

B. Participation of non-governmental organizations at sessions of the Commission for Social Development since the Summit

8. The Commission for Social Development is the functional commission of the Economic and Social Council with the primary responsibility for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the Summit. Since the Summit, the participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Commission for Social Development has increased markedly from one session to the next. In 1996, the special session of the Commission was attended by representatives from 49 non-governmental organizations. The number of non-governmental organizations that attended the thirty-fifth session of the Commission rose to 108, while at the thirty-sixth session of the Commission, in 1998, attendance by non-governmental organizations reached the unprecedented number of 141.

9. Since 1996, sessions of the Commission have been structured according to the themes of the Summit: poverty eradication, productive employment and social integration. Linking the work of the Commission to the follow-up to the Summit and directing its deliberations to issues dealt with at Copenhagen has also increased the interest of non-governmental organizations in its meetings.

10. In addition, meetings of the Commission have been organized in a manner that allows non-governmental organizations to make a more constructive and active contribution, focusing mainly on substantive issues emerging from the Summit. Some expert members of panels were selected from non-governmental organizations. At the thirty-sixth session of the Commission, a dialogue segment between representatives of non-governmental organizations and Member States was introduced for the first time. The Commission has therefore set in motion the active contribution of non-governmental organizations to global efforts to implement the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit.

III. Proposals for participation of non-governmental organizations in meetings of the Preparatory Committee and the special session

A. Participation in meetings of the Preparatory Committee

11. In its resolution 52/25, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the preparatory process for the special session benefits from the active involvement of all concerned. Accordingly, the Preparatory Committee should be open to the participation of non-governmental organizations. By its decisions 1996/208, 1996/315 and 1997/298, the Economic and Social Council decided, as an interim measure, to invite non-governmental organizations that were accredited to the Summit to attend sessions of the Commission for Social Development, provided that they had started the process of application for consultative status. Almost all non-governmental organizations accredited to the Summit have applied for consultative status with the Council and it is expected that most of them will be granted such status before the holding of the special session. The Committee may wish to give such organizations the opportunity to contribute to its work on the basis of those decisions taken by the Council.

B. Participation in the special session

12. In the same vein, the Preparatory Committee may wish to explore ways and means to facilitate the attendance of non-governmental organizations at the special session. The Committee could be guided by the experience gained during the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly on an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

13. With regard to the twentieth special session of the Assembly on the combat against illicit drugs (8 to 10 June 1998), the Assembly recognized, in its resolution 51/64, the need for the active involvement of non-governmental organizations in the preparatory process to ensure their contribution to that special session itself. At its second session, in March 1998, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, acting as the preparatory body for that special session, decided to invite the participation of non-governmental organizations that have been accredited to meetings of the preparatory body or are in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The Preparatory Committee may wish to be guided by this example in considering the participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session for the overall review of the Summit in the year 2000.